



Community and Economic Development in North Carolina and Beyond Blog: Reshaping Suburban Spaces

By CED Guest Author

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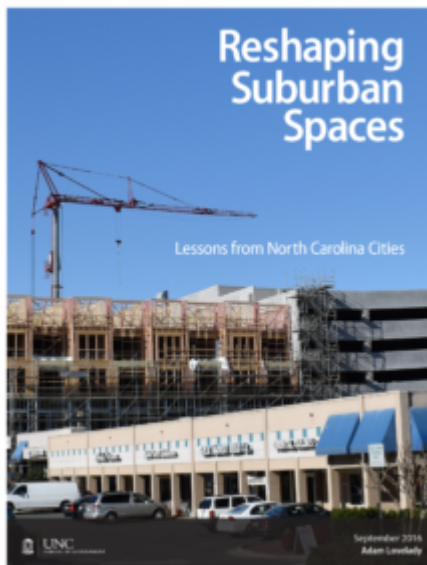
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There is no constant in community. Population ebbs and flows; market preferences shift; the economy fluctuates. Each community evolves. In many suburban places across North Carolina—indeed, across the U.S.—that evolution includes a move toward more density, more mixed uses, and more connected neighborhoods. Communities are grappling with questions about how these places will change. What is the local government's role in this transition? How does a city or county encourage the redevelopment of suburban spaces? And what are the practical and political implications?

A new School of Government report, *Reshaping Suburban Spaces*, considers these questions and explores how communities across North Carolina are responding.

These are complex topics, and there is no silver bullet. Cities are experimenting with different approaches and various

tools.



Consider Chapel Hill's zoning experiment. On the east side of town, three separate suburban redevelopments followed three different zoning processes. East 54, the redevelopment of an old motel site, was approved by the town's conventional process for major mixed-use development: a rezoning and special use permit. For Glen Lennox, a 1950s shopping center and garden apartment complex, the town negotiated a development agreement to address conventional zoning considerations in addition to significant infrastructure issues. And, for the Ephesus/Fordham area, a 1970s strip mall shopping district, the town adopted a form-based code, allowing significant redevelopment by right.



Also consider Charlotte's experiment with local government finance. Just south and east of Uptown Charlotte are three separate mall sites with three separate tales of suburban redevelopment. Through a substantial public-private partnership, the city assisted with the successful redevelopment of the old Charlottetown Mall into what is now the Metropolitan. A little farther south, SouthPark Mall remains a thriving commercial center, and private sector investment is bringing significant redevelopment to the suburban area. And, to the east, the city used bond funds to purchase the old Eastland Mall site, with hopes for private redevelopment. After several years of planning and discussions, that story is still unfolding.

There is no right way. There is no simple formula for suburban redevelopment. Rather, there is a set of tools for communities to consider. With each new project—with each success and each failure—communities are learning how best to approach reshaping suburban spaces.

The report explores how communities are experimenting. It is organized into three parts:

- "Designing Change" explores the infrastructure and urban design elements that shift a place from suburban to urban. These design considerations apply to private redevelopment through zoning standards, as well as to public improvements required through exactions or provided through public investment.
- "Zoning Change" considers the different approaches to zoning—site-specific conditional zoning, development agreements, and form-based codes—that North Carolina municipalities have used to accommodate suburban redevelopment.
- "Financing Change" outlines the tools and approaches for public and private participation in financing redevelopment.

Although the report is rooted in North Carolina law, the lessons provided are not limited to North Carolina cities. Many of the topics discussed—including many of the design considerations, zoning approaches, and financing options—are not unique to North Carolina.

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